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RESIST

Newsletter #227

A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority

June, 1990

No Turning Back: On Lesbian and Gay Rights or on Minority/Immigrant Rights

Last November, after a seventeen year battle, Massachusetts became the second state in the nation to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations. Almost immediately, a group called Families First began organizing a campaign to repeal the law in a referendum this November. Members of Families First went to churches and shopping centers gathering sufficient signatures to place the repeal question on the ballot. Ironically, however, the state's Attorney General has ruled that the bill cannot go to referendum because it specifically exempts religious organizations. (Religious organizations are still free to discriminate against whomever they choose, based on their religious principles, a compromise made after seventeen years to get the bill passed.) Apparently there is a state law which prevents referenda on questions concerning religious organizations.

Families First appealed the decision, and it went to the Supreme Judicial Court. Final arguments were heard in the case on April 5th; gay and lesbian interests are being represented by Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders. A decision had not yet been made when *Resist* went to press, but was expected at any time. In the meantime, Boston activists have begun to organize to defeat the referendum and save the law.

At three community meetings, eleven organizations representing people in the state, were elected to serve on a steering committee. These meetings were often fractious, with participants debating the process by which representation was decided, as well as strategic questions such as how visible gay and lesbian sexuality should be in the campaign. In April, however, a decision was made to include the words "Lesbian and Gay" in the campaign slogan.

In early May the "Progressive Caucus of the Campaign to Defeat the Referendum" organized a forum, "No Turning Back," to discuss campaign strategies. The group invited Amber Hollibaugh, who worked on the successful defeat of the Briggs Initiative in

and experience. Edited versions of Hollibaugh's and Hyde's comments are included in this issue.

At the forum, Sue Hyde remarked that the name Families First was a formulation that called forth other political ideas, "Families First, English Only, Men on Top, White is Right," reminding us that we shouldn't forget who makes up these movements. In this issue of *Resist* we also include an article on current efforts to oppose the English-Only Movement in Massachusetts. It is clear to both lesbian/gay activists and immigrant/minority activists that our opponents speak with the same bigotry and hatred. Yet it is not always clear to each group (except perhaps to those who live in both worlds)

People are told that we are unnatural, abnormal, sinful, perverse, and pathological. If we fail to engage our neighbors in a way that will counter those lies, then what will change it?

1978, and Sue Hyde, an organizer with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, as well as singer and composer Tom Wilson-Weinberg. The group plans additional forums throughout the summer, bringing to Massachusetts activists with a range of perspectives

that we can and must build alliances across sexualities and ethnicities, working together to combat those who wish to curtail our freedom.

—Tatiana Schreiber

No Turning Back: Strategies to Defeat Anti-Gay Referenda

SUE HYDE

Long-time lesbian activist Sue Hyde worked as News Editor at Gay Community News in Boston from 1983-1985. The following year she was active with the Gay and Lesbian Defense Committee, which formed to oppose the state's anti-gay foster care policy. She then joined the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and is currently a full-time organizer with NGLTF, campaigning state-by-state against sodomy laws and for sexual freedom. She brought a national perspective to the Massachusetts referendum.

The first time a lesbian and gay rights initiative was decided by voters was not in 1977 in Dade County, Florida, but in 1974, in Boulder, Colorado. This is a bit of forgotten lesbian and gay history, by the way. In a 2-1 vote, Boulder repealed a five month old ordinance in a tax-funded special election that was called to decide the fate of this new law, and also to recall the city's Black mayor and any city councilors who had supported

the bill. The Civil Rights law bit the dust, but the public officials survived the attack.

In the 16 years years since, there have been 25 separate referendato settle questions of lesbian and gay civil rights, or public health responses to AIDS. Only 7 of these 25 have been decided in our favor. There is a little bit of good news which is that the margins of defeat of the remaining 18 have dropped steadily over the years. In 1974, the Boulder law was repealed by a margin of 33% of the votes cast. Last year there were five different referenda on gay and lesbian issues in this country, and none was lost by more than 6% of the vote. Our widest margin of victory was in Seattle in 1978 with 18%; our narrowest was in a second referenda in Boulder, in 1987, which won by only 1%.

There have been only two statewide referenda on questions solely devoted to gay and lesbian people. The Briggs Initiative in 1978 was a rather spectacular come from behind victory with an 8% margin. Then, in 1988, in Oregon, a referendum to repeal the Governor's executive order which banned discrimi-

nation in state employment was a disappointing defeat by a 3% margin.

Campaign Tactics

In Wichita, Kansas, in 1978, the gay rights bill was buried by a 33% margin. No serious effort was made to contact voters, and one organizer said that proponents believed just floating the idea of lesbian and gay rights would be sufficient to win support; by osmosis, people would do the right thing and vote the right way. Unfortunately, the Wichita referendum was post-Dade County, and Anita Bryant visited the city before election day, which smashed any hope for a feeling of general good will among the citizenry of Wichita. Opponents used recycled ads and themes from Dade County, including the "specter" of drag queens in front of school blackboards and so on.

Wichita is an industrial city and the largest city in the state, yet no effort was made to work with organized labor. Some non-gay support was forthcom-

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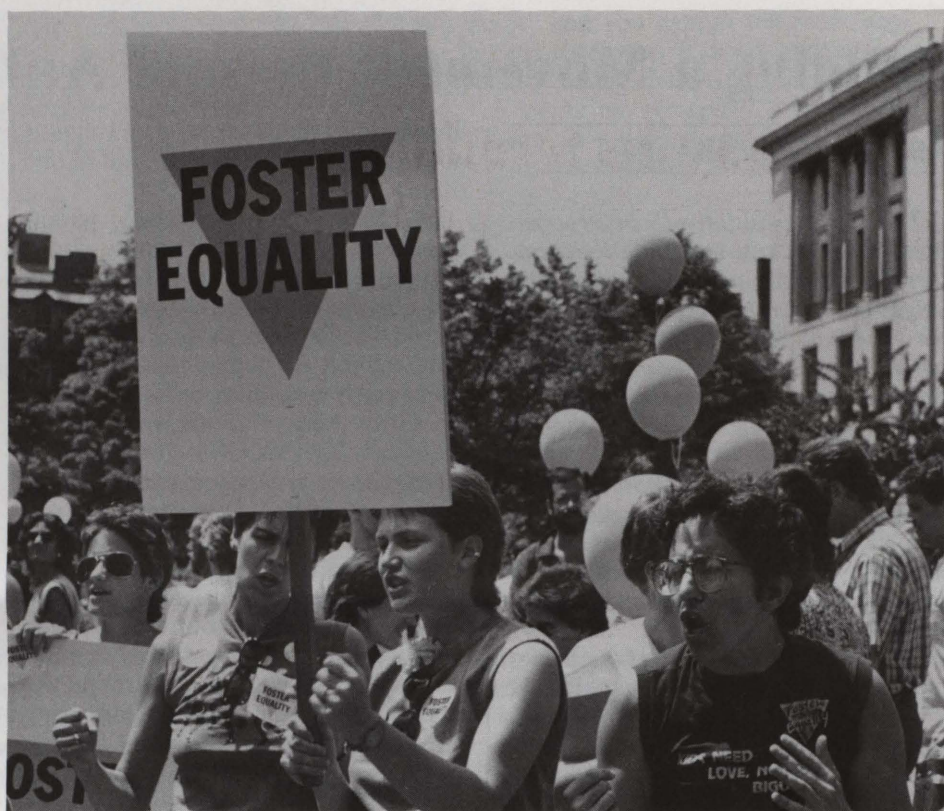
ing from Wichita State University faculty and staff, but, as organizer Keith Smith said, "We were just babies. We didn't know anything about voter contact or building coalitions."

In Boulder, in 1986, a group of five women (four dykes and one mom with Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) put a referendum on the ballot to reinstate the local civil rights ordinance that had been repealed in 1974. They raised \$9,000 and spent most of the money on a signature advertising campaign in the local paper. They also did some mass mailings to voters. The message was: Extend Civil Rights to Lesbians and Gay Men. A local feminist organization did an independent mailing to 10,000 voters. Organizer Sue Larson said that although opposition was virtually invisible throughout most of the campaign, suddenly, about a month before election day, leaflets and fliers began to appear in town warning that passage of the referendum would create the menace of AIDS in restaurants. This despite the fact that anti-discrimination protection for PWAs and HIV+ people already existed in the City Code.

Larson thought an important factor in the eventual success of the campaign was that the editor of the daily newspaper made the decision early on not to publish any letters containing biblical quotes, poetry, or personal slanders. So, in Sue's mind, a lot of the nastier stuff that comes up didn't have a forum. Proponents of the referendum conducted door to door outreach in what they felt were "receptive" neighborhoods. The ordinance passed by 295 votes out of 15,000 cast.

St. Paul, Minnesota was the site of two referenda. The first, in 1978, was to repeal a gay rights law, and another, in 1988, sought to ban referenda as a format to settle questions related to minority concerns. This was a preemptive move preceeding reintroduction of a gay rights law in the St. Paul City Council, so that once passed, it couldn't be repealed again. In 1978, the gay rights ordinance had been on the books for three years, and had seemed to cause no problems. But, a group of fundamentalists, perhaps inspired by Anita Bryant's victory in Dade County, decided to challenge the law through popular vote.

Gay and lesbian activists raised \$110,000, and defended the law through advertising, door-to-door voter contact (again in what they



Sue Hyde and other activists demonstrating for foster care equality for lesbians/gays at Boston Gay Pride. Photo: Nancy Wechsler

deemed "winnable" neighborhoods), endorsements by religious leaders, and sermonizing the Sunday before election day. They also got endorsements from big time politicians, the mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul, a couple of members of Congress, and so on. They spent one day saturating the conservative "unreachable" precincts with literature. Despite all this, the St. Paul law went down by a margin of 13%.

Stephen Endean, who was living in St. Paul at the time, and is now on the staff of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, thought the fundamentalists were successful in making gay and lesbian rights a votable issue in the campaign. Voters were faced with whatever emotional confusion and fog surrounds homosexuality for them, and they tended to vote their caution, voting for whatever they understood to be the status quo.

Endean believes that had the lesbian and gay organizers been able to make the fundamentalists themselves the issue, they might have preserved the gay rights law. I gather he meant that some kind of personalization of the opponents of gay and lesbian civil rights might have been effective. And it is interesting to reflect that one of the more effective tactics of the Gay and

Lesbian Defense Committee (the group organized in Massachusetts to oppose discrimination against gay people as foster parents) was to firmly identify the foster care policy with Governor Michael Dukakis, demonizing Dukakis.

Endean also said that in Seattle, in 1978, where the gay rights law was retained by the widest margin, Seattle police were very active in the campaign to repeal the law. Just before the election the Police Department and individual cops became embroiled in a controversy that erupted when a young man was shot by the police in questionable circumstances. According to Endean, the police became the issue, rather than the gay rights law or the gay and lesbian community. In his mind, this incident tipped the scales; the people of Seattle, like the people of St. Paul, cast votes based not on logic but on the feeling of the moment.

In Athens, Ohio, in 1989, the Alliance to Protect Human Rights in Athens (APHRA) formed to preserve a local civil rights law. APHRA was able to snare every possibly significant political endorsement in the community. Athens is not a very big town, with 25,000 people, and it's a university

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Building a Movement Beyond Anti-Gay Referenda

AMBER HOLLIBAUGH

The "Briggs Initiative", or Proposition 6, was an anti-gay initiative sponsored by California State Senator John Briggs in 1978. The initiative called for the firing of known gay teachers or school administrators, or anyone publicly discussing gay or lesbian issues in settings involving youth. Although polls several months prior to the vote showed overwhelming support for the measure, it was defeated by a margin of 58 to 42. Amber Hollibaugh was involved in the fight against Proposition 6, and talked about her experiences. For a more detailed analysis, see "Sexuality and the State: The Defeat of the Briggs Initiative and Beyond" in Socialist Review, May/June, 1979. Hollibaugh currently works with the AIDS Discrimination Unit of the New York City Human Rights Commission.

The Briggs Initiative, like other anti-gay referenda, was based on the desire to make it impossible for homosexuals and homosexuality to be visible in any positive context. Though shaped differently, all the referenda are basically about putting us, our belief systems, and our sexuality, on trial.

I had been organizing for years and years on lesbian and gay issues, and I lived in San Francisco, but the idea of working on something statewide seemed almost impossible. California is huge both geographically and numerically, and it's basically an agricultural state, made up of small cities and towns, with pockets, Los Angeles and San Francisco, that are more urban and somewhat more sophisticated around lesbian and gay issues, and which are the centers of lesbian and gay urban life.

We couldn't assume that the proposition would be defeated even if we won in LA or San Francisco. We had to develop a strategy that went way beyond whatever we knew previously about organizing in urban centers or university towns. We had to think both about our resources and about our definition of a successful campaign in contexts that very few of us knew about because most of us had fled those very areas we needed to go back to and organize in! We *knew* what small town

life was like, and most of us had chosen not to be there, so it was really kind of terrifying.

Of course, there were fights within the lesbian and gay community about what an adequate strategy looked like, and the fights broke down, as they always do, between those who wanted high visibility on human rights/privacy issues and low visibility on homosexuality, versus those of us that wanted to do grassroots high visibility confrontation around issues of homosexuality and sex in general. I think we spent far too much time fighting each other over these strains and tensions. Some of it came from real political difference and some of it came from our terror. None of us were sure *what* we should do, and campaigns that we had seen around the country had been losing, using many different kinds of strategies.

The California Thirteen

In this context, some of us decided that we wanted to organize in small towns. We were able to avoid some of the infighting because we had a different notion than many of the others who were debating strategy; we saw this as an opportunity to work on the longer range project of building a lesbian and gay movement. This was an opportunity to go places where we had never been invited, to go back to places that we had left, and to raise issues that had not been discussable previously.

What we wanted to do and what we wanted to gain was not dependent on the outcome of the proposition. It was not that we thought that it wouldn't be a set-back if we lost; it wasn't as though we didn't know what the impact of an explicit slap in the face can do to a lesbian and gay movement. But we had a long range view of what it takes to build that movement. We were encouraged by the idea that we could use this campaign to articulate a set of values that would begin to undercut the deep roots of homophobia that allowed the proposition to exist in the first place.

Frankly, most of us who decided to do the grassroots organizing didn't think we would successfully defeat the proposition, but we were challenged by the idea of going to these towns and finding lesbians and gay men there and supporting them, and figuring out how to build alliances in those places. We

wanted to build a movement that would encourage lesbians and gay men to live as we are, where we are, and not to make our decisions about our lesbian and gay identities based on whether or not we can get to San Francisco or LA or Boston or Chicago.

We were called the California Outreach Group. There were thirteen of us, and California is kind of big. No one else really wanted to do what we wanted to do, so we decided that if the more central organizations would help support the education and outreach that we wanted to do in small towns and cities across California, then we would go out and do it. Everyone thought we were kind of crazy, and that we would probably get beaten up, but more power to us if we were stupid enough to try it. So some of us were stupid enough....

Our sense was that lesbians and gay men in these communities knew better than we did what kind of political organizing would work, but they needed tools and skills, like how to write a leaflet, how to put an office together, how to create mailing lists, how to build alliances with other organizations when you aren't sure how out you can be. We felt we had the resources and skills to help people make those strategic decisions. That was our hypothesis. We weren't sure it was true, but it sounded good.

So we wrote literature that we thought would help build skills, like a piece on how to do public speaking about homosexuality. We knew it was incredibly difficult for us to speak about lesbian and gay issues as out lesbian and gay people, and people trying it for the first time needed support and ideas. We also put together a series of fact sheets that gave arguments against the most commonly entertained myths about us as child molesters and deviants, and the other stereotypes about us, in particular in reference to how debate on the Briggs initiative was being shaped.

We put together some background information, such as an article from *Radical America* called "Sex, Family and the New Right," by Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter, and "A Citizen's Guide to the New Right," so that people could understand where some of these opposition forces were coming from and who the opposition was in

their communities. We gathered all the literature we could find from progressive groups, and from Democrats and Republicans that were working against the proposition across the state, so that this would all be readily available.

Then we rented an oversized van and put all the literature in the back of the van, and we sent me out on the road for two and half months — a truly remarkable experience, and I'm still here to tell about it. We knew that part of what is so scary about being gay in a small town is that you only know four other people and you are all terrified, and organizing seems like an impossible task and no one has ever told you it is possible. That's an important message to say to other lesbians and gay men — that you can make a difference where you are, and I'll help support you to figure out what you need so that you can do what you do best in your town.

Small town rural California is primarily working class; it's either white or Mexican or migrant worker, or Black if it's a town that had railroads and shipping industries. It was important to know the history of organizing there, in terms of farmworker organizing as well as the role of Parent/Teacher Associations within communities. We had to think about what groups are important in small towns as opposed to big cities: PTAs, women's clubs, veteran's organizations, hospital volunteers — these are the key social connectors in a small town, as well as local newspapers and radio.

Someone named Dutch

Early on in the campaign someone named Dutch in rural northern California had called a lesbian and gay speaker's bureau in San Francisco to ask if there was anyone willing to be on his agricultural information show. He had a show from 7:00 to 10:00 AM on probably the most listened-to program in the area. He did news, weather, farm reports and discussion. Well, they told Dutch I would be on the show.

I was terrified. I couldn't figure out why the guy would invite an out lesbian to his radio show; it looked to me like a set up. On live radio people call up and harangue you and you can't do a whole lot about it. Well, I went out to Marysville and we did the show. We had to stop the show twice because of bomb threats, but a couple of real interesting things started to happen.

I did a presentation, talked about the

Briggs Initiative, and said that I was from a small town in California; I was raised in Roseville, in the northern part of the state.... I thought it was important that people know that I came from the kinds of towns I was going to, and that that was part of why I was selected to go out on the road. Well, the first call that came in was from my aunt, who was very mad that I had never *told her*, and wanted to know whether I was coming over for dinner with Uncle Jim and Aunt Marge. So I said I really didn't

The drag queens of northern and central California knew every bar, every hang-out, every truck stop, every restaurant ... and in which booths the lesbians and gay men sat.... Denny's is enormously important to lesbian and gay life, I'm here to testify.

think I'd make it this time — maybe next time I was traveling around California with homosexual literature in my van I'd be sure to come by for dinner. That did establish me as an insider rather than an outsider.

There were a lot of phone calls that were predictable and kind of rabid, but if you don't panic and don't rise to the occasion, people really sound pretty terrible saying that kind of stuff and they go on and on and pretty soon they sound crazy. They hang themselves.

The other interesting thing that started to happen was that gay people began to call in; radio is anonymous, nobody has to be identified, and people began to phone and say "I own a farm, I've lived here for 45 years, my family comes from this area, I've always been a homosexual, I intend to stay here, nobody is going to make me move, and I'm proud of being gay." That was extraordinary to hear on a radio station that broadcast to the entire part of rural California that I was traveling through; to hear lesbians and gay men talking about their lives in small towns in a local forum, but one where they could do so safely. That was important to me.

After the radio show Dutch and I went and had a cup of coffee. He's about 55 years old, white hair, kind of a low-key farm guy, and I said, "Why did you have me on this show?" and he said, "When I was 50 years old I tried to kill myself because of what I couldn't deal with all my life. I don't intend to let another lesbian or gay man go through it." I learned again what is hard to remember when you are oppressed — that we have allies in places we don't

know, and you cannot tell from how people look who is queer and who is willing to take chances.

It made me remember that I really needed to be checking myself about who I was entering those towns, and remember who was surviving there, and making a life there, and remember that I was entering and I was leaving. It meant that I had to respect the community values in each town, and respect the way that people lived gay lives there, and not make assumptions from the

choices I had made in my life, because I couldn't live in those places. I had had to leave.

The Drag Queens Knew Everything

What I noticed very quickly was that the parts of lesbian and gay life that were sustained in rural California were the most visible parts, the ones that are most despised by the more mainstream lesbian and gay movement. The drag queens, the butch women.... They knew everyone that was queer, every car salesman who slept with men, every closeted gay, half-out and half-in, the entire structure. They were the social organization for homosexuality in small towns; they sustained and saved lesbian and gay youth; they built networks which took care of people in times of grief; and they were the ones that confronted homophobia because they represented everyone's fear of homosexuality, and were oppressed because *they* were visible.

The drag queens of northern and central California knew every bar, every hang-out, every truck stop, every restaurant where you could go after 1:00 AM, and in which booths the lesbians and gay men sat.... Denny's is enormously important to lesbian and gay life, I'm here to testify. We got very good at putting "No on #6" stickers in the pie cases where you can see the mirrors and they'd reflect "No on #6" behind the coconut cream pies.

The other place I spent a lot of time was in bars. I had a slide show which I would show in bars, because that's

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Activists Target English-Only in Massachusetts

LYDIA LOWE

My grandfather was Polish. When he came here, he had to learn English. Why shouldn't today's immigrants have to learn English? This is America!

When I came here from Italy, I didn't know English. Hispanic immigrants nowadays are too arrogant. They should learn English too, instead of demanding bilingual services.

What is the "English Only" movement and where does it come from? The move to establish English as the official language of the United States is backed by several well-funded national organizations, the most influential of which is called US English. Its national strategy is to propose a federal constitutional amendment by passing official language laws in at least 33 states. Seventeen states to date have passed official language laws. The US English organization is allegedly targeting Massachusetts, New York, and Texas for its upcoming campaigns, and recently succeeded in passing a non-binding referendum in the city of Lowell, MA.

The three main arguments for making English the official language can be summarized as follows: 1) we need a common bond to unite the country; 2) government and business are discouraging immigrants from learning English by providing bilingual services; and 3) we must prevent immigrants from segregating themselves in language ghettos and making the U.S. a "Tower of Babel."

Correcting Misconceptions

Does an official language build unity? While it seems logical on the surface, a little history of language politics is telling. In the 18th century, the authors of the Constitution debated establishing an official language, but decided against it out of concern for the potential negative impact of such a policy on religious freedom and immigration. Interestingly, two-thirds of the world's nations have no official language. Most of those which do also have specific clauses in their constitutions to protect the rights of language minorities. Historically, official language policies have been viewed as

Is English-Only Really Coming to Massachusetts?

- * Official language bills have been filed consistently in the state legislature for the past several years;
- * In 1988, former Representative Charles Silvia (Fall River) announced a signature campaign for an English language statewide referendum;
- * In spring, 1989, bilingual advocates and educators were tipped off by friends in Washington, DC that Massachusetts, New York and Texas were 1990 targets of US English;
- * A slow but steady trickle of newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and radio/TV talk shows began to appear on the topic;
- * In November, 1989, Lowell, MA passed an English language referendum by a 3:1 margin; George Kouloheras, Lowell School Committee member, announced the intention to go statewide, beginning with signature campaigns for district-based initiatives;
- * In March, 1990, two bills to dismantle bilingual education across the state were proposed, but sent to committee to be studied after massive protest;
- * Recently, bumper stickers have been seen: "One Nation, One Flag, One Language."

Yes, English Only is coming to Massachusetts!

equally likely to be divisive as unifying.

Do today's immigrants no longer want or need to learn English? No! In fact, immigrant and newcomer communities know all too well that to get along in the United States one must know English. According to a 1985 survey, cited by the Northern California ACLU, 98% of Latino parents feel it is essential for their children to read and write English perfectly — a higher percentage than for native-born white and Black parents. Waiting lists for English classes in Boston's Chinatown average two to three years. The Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training recently released a study which showed that 8,600 people in the state are on waiting lists for adult education classes, primarily for English as a Second Language. In Los Angeles, there are over 40,000 people on ESL waiting lists, and in New York, 26,000. And these figures are just official waiting lists.

While public perception has it that immigrants are coddled with special bilingual services, nothing is farther from the truth. We who speak English take for granted many advantages which limited English-speakers do not have: access to news media; freedom to speak in school or on the job; the ability to read subway maps, bills, or daily mail; or to make a phone call to ask for information.

Will making English the official language help immigrants by giving them

the push they need? No, again. *English Only laws do not help people learn English!* Such laws do nothing to guarantee more resources for English learning programs, yet they restrict the lives of limited-English speakers. The effects of official language laws can be seen by looking at examples from states which have passed such laws:

- * a Miami cashier was suspended without pay for speaking Spanish at work;
- * a San Francisco hospital worker was fired for not speaking English;
- * a Los Angeles supervisor asked employees to report anyone *overheard* using another language;
- * in Monterey Park, CA, an ordinance was passed restricting foreign language signs, public or private; the mayor blocked the donation of Chinese language books to the public library;
- * in Arizona, parole hearings for non-English speaking persons were postponed because public employees were only allowed to speak English.

What is Behind the English Only Movement?

Official language campaigns certainly thrive on innocent misunderstanding and ignorance. But the more insidious nature of this movement becomes clear when we consider its context. In Massachusetts, for example, we are in the middle of a budget crisis with cuts coming down in education, elderly benefits, local aid, and practically every human

service program. Unemployment is growing. Whether in the 1890s or the 1990s, it is in this atmosphere of competition for scarce resources that immigrant and minority communities are most easily scapegoated. Today, racism and nativism are combined because most of the immigrants are people of color.

Meanwhile minority and immigrant populations are experiencing rapid growth. From 1980-1988, estimates are that the white population in the U.S. grew by only 5%. On the other hand, the number of Blacks grew by 15%, Hispanics by 35%, Asians and others by 55%! By the year 2000, white men may be only 20% of the incoming workforce. We are becoming citizens and registering to vote in greater numbers and at a faster rate. *Time* and *Newsweek* are running articles about "the browning of America" and "what will the U.S. be like when whites are no longer the majority?" In short, a lot of white America is worried about the future.

In this context of scarce resources and the growing impact of minority communities, the English Only specter arises. The stated goals of US English, the most influential of the official language organizations, are to pass a federal constitutional amendment, limit bilingual education to a transitional role, and *abolish multilingual ballots*. US English founder John Tanton also launched the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which aims to restrict immigration. FAIR received financial backing from the Pioneer Fund, a foundation established in 1937 to popularize "applied genetics in present-day Germany," i.e. Adolph Hitler's racist forced sterilization program. English First, another of the major official language organizations, suggests that Hispanics are a national security threat.

The English Only movement boils down to the manipulation of the voting public, primarily white voters, in order to reinforce institutional racism/stratification and prevent the growth of minority political power. While the content of the English Only movement is racist to the core, activists need to avoid playing into racial polarization, and writing off the broader body of official language supporters. Instead, the responsibility falls on us — immigrant/minority communities and our allies — to develop a political perspective and a message which can win over the major-

ity.

Scary as it is, English Only can be fought. To date, official language measures have been defeated in about a dozen states. Importantly, however, all of these battles have been fought in state legislative chambers, not in the voting booth. All of the major battles to date that went to popular vote resulted in the passage of official language laws. But important lessons can be learned from these experiences. Two lessons which stand out to me are the importance of both empowering minority communities *and* understanding the average white voter.

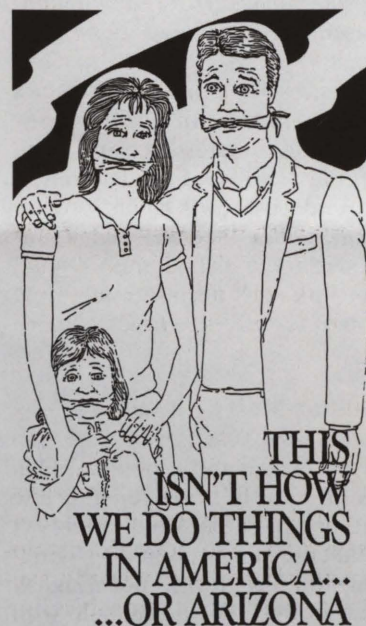
Lowell and the Bigot Bill

Lowell, Massachusetts has a long history of immigrant newcomers dating back to the influx of Irish and Eastern European immigrants to work in the textile mills. Today, Lowell has the largest Cambodian population in Massachusetts and a sizeable Latino community, as well as a large white working class. Once a booming center of the textile industry, Lowell was hit hard by the flight of factories to the non-union South in the 20th century. The local economy picked up temporarily with the growth of the high-tech industry, but is now suffering from a slowdown and layoffs at Wang Laboratories.

Racial tensions in Lowell have flared over the last five years, particularly in the overcrowded and underfunded schools, culminating a few years back in the murder of a Cambodian schoolboy. In response to the tension, coalitions across communities had begun to take shape when a prominent member of the Lowell School Committee filed petitions for a local English Only referendum. Though it was just a month before election day, local organizations responded immediately. The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association and the Buddhist temple called a press conference and alerted surrounding communities. Latino parents and bilingual education advocates joined housing and electoral activists to mount a grassroots campaign with a call to "Stop the Bigot Bill."

But, with the election only a month away, the deadline for voter registration was too close to accommodate the largely unregistered minority, immigrant communities; there wasn't enough time for public education to reach most people. The "bigot bill" label did give bilingual advocates a temporary initiative, putting English Only

leader George Koulcheras on the defensive in the media. Local articles focused on Koulcheras, explaining why he was not a bigot. But I think in the long run this backfired. Without the time to really educate the public and expose the racism of English Only, many white voters reacted defensively as well, angry at "being called a bigot" and ignorant of the real issues behind the referendum. The bill passed by a three-to-one margin.



"This isn't how we do things in Arizona."

In Arizona, an English Language amendment passed, but by only a 2% margin. In that state, coalition-building efforts to counter English Only began a year and a half before the showdown at the polls. The Arizona coalition drew strength from the large Chicano/Mexicano community that was starting to flex its muscle, and also garnered support from mainstream political leaders including the governor, senators, and other elected officials.

The Arizona campaign successfully developed a message and slogan which were understandable to the average white Arizonan. They countered the nativism of English Only with a patriotic appeal reaffirming positive American values like freedom and opportunity:

In America and Arizona, we stand up to those who would undermine our Freedom and say "No." Because, in this country, we have a better way of doing things. We believe everyone has the right to be heard.

Their literature featured a picture of a family gagged (by English Only laws) and accompanied by the slogan "This isn't how we do things in Arizona." This approach offered white voters a positive way to understand and identify with the campaign.

Though the amendment passed, it was by the narrowest margin yet in a popular vote on the language issue. The campaign laid the groundwork for a recent decision in federal District Court in Phoenix that overturned the amendment based on its violation of free speech rights.

Other successful political strategies have involved passage of positive legislation in some states declaring an "English Plus" policy. Such legislation can detail specific civil rights protections against language-based discrimination, declare a broad multilingual policy, or link such declarations to the allocation of resources to English learning programs.

Our Coalition Must be Broad

Here in Massachusetts we will need to develop a message and a political plan that can effectively bring together the forces needed to defeat English Only. I suggest that our slogan should be "English Learning Programs, not English Language Laws." We are people who

are struggling to learn and teach our families English, yet we are confronted with the charge that we oppose the English language. Instead, we must expose the real impact of an official language policy on minority and immigrant communities. The fight for stronger bilingual programs and language equality must continue side-by-side with a broader appeal to counter English Only laws. The breadth of our coalition must be equal to the sweeping implications of the English Only movement.

Immigrant and refugee communities which are under attack will form the core of this coalition. The clearest and most consistent commitment to this campaign and its essence — the struggle for minority empowerment — will come from our own people. To mobilize this energy and commitment, we need to unite community leaders and develop a comprehensive grassroots education strategy: articles in local newspapers; information tables at street fairs; spreading the word through English classes, housing developments and community organizations. We can simultaneously begin a voter registration campaign, so that as we become aware of these issues we become a potent political force.

Defeating English Only means chal-

lenging ourselves to see new perspectives and build new bridges. English Only threatens many sectors of society. It threatens humanitarian values and the freedom to worship in other languages, important issues for religious communities. The struggle to preserve and strengthen bilingual education will move many parents and educators. The issues of civil liberties and freedom of speech can appeal to a broad spectrum of people. And some of our businesses will agree that it narrows our economic horizons in the areas of foreign trade, tourism, and targeted marketing.

Defeating English Only means reaching the person on the street. But to get there from where we are today — an ad-hoc committee with no money or staff — means digging in, mobilizing our communities, and developing strategic allies. We still have time to defeat English Only in Massachusetts. To get involved, call Massachusetts English Plus at (617) 357-4499. For national information, contact the English Plus Information Clearinghouse at 202-544-0004. □

Lydia Lowe is the Administrative Director of the Chinese Progressive Association Workers' Center, and a coordinating member of Massachusetts English Plus.

Hyde *continued from page three*

town about 75 miles southeast of Columbus. APHRA ran a series of signature ads with these important people, showing that the leadership of the community supported the gay rights law.

APHRA did no literature drops, though opponents did. Steve Kropf of APHRA said that the opponents had no organization; no person was identified with them, they had no face or name. But, in the privacy of the voting booth, Kropf thought people in Athens tended to vote their prejudice and their nervousness about sexuality. The margin of defeat was so small, less than 100 votes, that it's hard to believe that taking on the issue of sexuality in a more direct way would not have changed the outcome. Whether it would have moved people in the direction we want them to go is another question.

Opposition to the Humanity of Lesbians and Gay Men

If there was one theme that ran through my conversations with people, it was this: questions that contain the

words "sexual orientation" or "lesbian and gay" or allude to homosexuality in some way, may have various specific content, but no matter what that content is, the most compelling feature is sexual orientation. Regardless of the vigor of the organizing effort, or the visibility of those who oppose us (and in some of these communities there was virtually no organized opposition), there is always opposition to lesbian and gay advancement however it is phrased. That opposition is an individualized internal inability to extend not civil rights, but humanity, to lesbians and gay men. Why would we expect otherwise? Non-gay people and gay people are told that we are unnatural, abnormal, sinful, perverse, and pathological. If we fail to engage our neighbors in a way that will counter those lies, then what will change it?

It seems to me that talk radio, television, the movies ... the mass media exists to maintain power relationships, not to challenge or change them. This is why I find absurd the notion that gay-positive TV ads, interspersed with typi-

cal TV fare, would sway any non-gay person. I just don't think it's going to work. Political ads on TV and radio have two functions: to increase name and face recognition of a candidate, and to take out of context the most miserable failing of the opposing candidate and write it large across TV screens. This is not to say that some advertising ought not to be done in support of gay rights laws, but some people I spoke with emphasized quite strongly that they thought reliance on advertising alone is an error.

As far as VIP endorsements are concerned, I concluded from people I spoke with that VIPs are most helpful when they themselves get involved in the campaign. Stephen Endean told me about going door-to-door with a Congressman from the Twin Cities, which was quite effective. But to have only a name with no face or action behind it seems not hurtful, but not really that helpful.

I am not sure that people are persuaded by leaders who declare themselves to be gay supportive on this ques-

tion, but one thing we can be sure of is that our opponents absolutely will follow their gay-bashing leaders, who will doubtless sweep through Massachusetts. We can anticipate that Lou Sheldon from the Traditional Values Coalition and Rep. William Dannemeyer from California will be here to rally the troops in Massachusetts. Dannemeyer will be able to take advantage of a great deal of voter discontent in this state over the Democrat-created budget fiasco, and he will also take advantage of Representative Barney Frank's troubles in Washington in the context of his reelection campaign.

Unfortunately, when people are discontented in a general way, someone gets scapegoated, and we not only have two openly gay Congresspeople running for reelection, but we may also have a question on the ballot concerning one of the least popular minorities in this culture. I can hear it now: the party of Sodomites will lead us down the path to wrack and ruin, and here's a chance to punish the evil 'mos (as Dannemeyer likes to call us) and their political allies, the Democrats.

While the question of the referendum itself will be decided by the Supreme Judicial Court, I think that every lesbian and gay man in this state has to wrestle with two questions, and we have to wrestle with these individually and collectively: What is the nature of homophobia and anti-gay bigotry, and what can I do to convince my friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors, to cast a vote *against* the brownshirts and choir robes, and to cast a vote *for* my freedom and my dignity as a gay or lesbian citizen. □

Hollibaugh *continued from page five*

where people would go to have some experience of community. And I would help people organize small groups within their communities.

After I had been on the road a while, we began to have a network of lesbians and gay men from small towns that were willing to go to other people's small towns and be out. Marysville, where I did the talk show, has a twin, Yuba City, just across from it. The main social center in each town is a huge shopping mall. So Yuba City people would go over to Marysville and hand out explicit lesbian and gay literature, and people from Marysville would go to Yuba City. If you were from one city

and went to the other, chances are you wouldn't be known. That was the kind of brilliant organizing that went on over and over again.

Though I had thought I would primarily be taking literature to people and telling them how to set up offices and put out press releases, I realized that I had another important role because I could be public in places that other people couldn't take chances on being public. So I also ended up doing an enormous amount of public speaking on radio shows, interviews with the *Pine Cone Gazette*, and wherever local people didn't feel they could take it on.

I debated the people that others were terrified of debating, because when you are first trying to figure it out you don't want to be debating a fundamentalist minister. The religious right is often powerful in those places, so you had to be able to talk to that constituency. You couldn't really divide things up in liberal and conservative terms. The key is to really know that we have a right to be out, we have a right to be where we are speaking, we have a right to demand our freedom. When you have that perspective, it's very persuasive. You are not on the defensive, and you can change dynamics in a room with people who expect you to get defensive about whether or not you have a right to be gay.

We were very willing to explicitly take up the issue, not of homosexuality, but of sexuality. Often, the issue appeared to be homosexuality, but it really wasn't. It is true that people don't know many things about us and have many questions, some of them very odd. It is possible to be sympathetic about what it is to be completely denied information in this culture at the most basic level; you can look at your audience and know that part of why they are so hostile to you is that they have been given nothing but rumor and innuendo to base their information on. They don't know us and they don't know about sex generally.

When people were asking me questions about homosexuality, they were often actually talking about sexuality. What did I think about sex? What did I think about sex for women? What did I think about sex for men? For children? About sexual freedom? That's what the questions were really about, and that was incredibly exciting to me. I like having those discussions. I like talking about sex a lot. I didn't have all the answers, and that's also very persuasive

with an audience.

You do not have to have all the answers or have every piece of information to have this kind of discussion with people. For example, women who are mothers have to deal with the issues of incest and rape, so they are very concerned about what's happening with their kids sexually, but women also know who really does rape, and who really does molest, and you can turn that question around and get into a discussion about what might really change the nature of children's ability to resist. You can talk about what information children need about sex in order to be able to actually say yes as well as no. When you've had that conversation, you've had a conversation that can also change people's minds about homosexuality. When people believe that children have the right to desire, you've begun to lay a basis for all people to have a right to their sexuality.

In this culture, where people are denied a right to a sexual identity, heterosexuality isn't a sexual identity, it's a social identity. When you make an argument that is pro-sex, it's profound, and it moves people. I think that we can win. Maybe not the first time, but definitely the second.

If we can shake up the sexual definitions that control everyone in this culture, we can build a political movement that we can be part of, but which is broader than the lesbian and gay movement; it is really a radical movement for social change. My agenda is not to win an election, but to help bring about radical change that actually allows people the freedom to feel desire as they feel it, wherever they are, and to live the way they need to live in order to be sexual.

I encourage you to have hope, to assume that you can have this vision, that it's very possible, and that there are lesbian and gay men in all of the towns that need to be reached; in all of those industrial working class towns, in all those small rural areas, and that with the support and sustenance that we are able to bring to people, we can make a difference in helping to build a political movement that spreads throughout the state, and a lesbian and gay identity that is much broader than any urban identity we have yet been able to shape. □

GRANTS

In this issue of Resist, in honor of gay pride events nationwide, we highlight recent grants to lesbian/gay activist groups.

National Latina/o Lesbian and Gay Organization, P.O. Box 44483, Washington, DC 20026.

During the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, in 1987, the National Latina/o Lesbian and Gay Organization (LLEGO) was born, with over 70 people from 13 states and Puerto Rico attending *el Primer Encuentro*. LLEGO has since been actively involved nationally to bring issues of homophobia, sexism and discrimination to the general Latino/Hispanic population as well as to non-Latinos. Now the group has a national office and an interim board representing Eastern, Central and Western regions.

LLEGO's activities are directed toward developing leadership among lesbian and gay Latinos, and encouraging artistic and educational expressions drawing on the history and struggles of Latino communities. In 1989 LLEGO received a sub-contract from the National Minority AIDS Council to provide culturally sensitive AIDS education, and was the first gay organization to be invited to participate in the Council de La Raza, a Latino health and education organization. The AIDS work gave LLEGO the opportunity to address homophobia and discrimination in a wide range of settings.

Campaign '90 is LLEGO's commit-

ment to develop a progressive national agenda for lesbian and gay Latinos, and to bring a wider network of activists into the legislative arena in the areas of discrimination, economic issues, health and immigration policy. Resist's recent grant went for a slide projector and screen to present LLEGO's slide show, which provides positive images of Latino lesbian and gay life in the U.S.

Gay and Lesbian Community Network, 2316 Delaware Avenue, Suite 267, Buffalo, New York 14216.

This group began as a network for Buffalo lesbian and gay men, and as an umbrella for lesbian/gay organizations in the community. An anti-gay District Attorney, who, in Spring, 1989, remarked that gay people bring on crimes of violence against themselves, provided an opportunity for the Network to mobilize a high-visibility campaign for gay rights, and the energy has been with the group ever since.

The group now puts out a monthly mailing, provides information and referrals, and sponsors events including a well-attended "Gay and Lesbian Literacy" series. The series, billed as "a course for lesbians and gay men ... to teach ourselves about ourselves ... to give each of us some firing power," featured presentations on social/political history; gay and lesbian American history; psychology and mental health; and homosexuality and the law. The Network organized gay pride events in 1989, and was the recipient of an Achievement Award from

the New York State Lesbian and Gay Lobby.

This year, the Network is again a key organizer for the area's Lesbian and Gay Pride Unity Fest, which will include an AIDS memorial service, lesbian and gay film festival, "Hall of Shame" awards, and voter registration. Resist's grant went toward printing brochures for these events.

Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance, P.O. Box 197, Asheville, NC, 28802

Three years ago there was no openly identified gay or lesbian political group in western North Carolina. The Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance (SALGA) grew from an initial group of about fifteen people who had gathered after the 1987 March on Washington to discuss how they could organize politically. The group now has over 80 active members, and has maintained a commitment to grassroots organizing.

Activities have included establishing a media response to National Coming Out Day in October, 1988; work on the passage of a local anti-discrimination resolution; extensive Gay Pride Month events; and letter-writing campaigns. The group has provided anti-racism training for its members, and has a Speaker's Bureau to give presentations for schools, PTAs and community groups.

In August, 1989, SALGA began a project to document discrimination against gay men and lesbians in housing, employment, schooling, receipt of services, property destruction, and homophobic violence. A volunteer staff collects data for the project by weekly visits to sites frequented by the lesbian and gay community including a black community center, the YWCA, gay bars, and gay and lesbian support group meetings. The volunteers record stories and then compile the data. SALGA will contribute the data to a pool being collected throughout North Carolina by organizations such as the NC Coalition Against Racial and Religious Violence.

Because many lesbians and gays are uncomfortable retelling their stories in public locations, SALGA has set up a phone line for the project, staffed by trained volunteers. Resist's grant went to telephone costs.

Join the Resist Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge. Pledges account for over 25% of our income. By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder, along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded, and the other work being done at Resist. So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

☐ **Yes! I would like to become a Resist Pledge. I'd like to pledge \$_____ / _____ (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, 2x a year, yearly).**

☐ **Enclosed is my pledge contribution of \$_____.**

☐ **I can't join the pledge program just now, but here's a contribution to support your work. \$_____**

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